



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL

VENTNOR EARLY YEARS CENTRE

7PM

12 SEPTEMBER 2011

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors: Steve Stubbings (Mayor), David George, Harry Rees, Jim Morgan, Jim Toogood, Mark Robertson-Walker, Simon Haytack, Jason Mack

NO. SUBJECT

PUBLIC FORUM

The Mayor opened the Public Forum with 11 members of the public present. County Councillor Chris Welsford was also present; County Councillor Susan Scoccia had sent her apologies.

- a) A member of the public referred to the report *Ventnor Town Council and the Winter Gardens* stating his view that it revealed bungling incompetence and naivety with important financial decisions being taken in private by a small group of councillors engaging in unlawful conduct in respect of catering contracts and failing to record matters discussed and decisions taken. He asked what the Town Council had learned from the report.
- b) The Mayor responded that the overriding thing he had learned was that a Town Council should not run a commercial operation like the Winter Gardens.
- c) Councillor Harry Rees said that it had been produced for the benefit of the ratepayers in the form of an unbiased and factual record and not as any kind of vendetta against former councillors.
- d) Councillor David George said the excellent report revealed the dangers of a culture of secrecy around the business of the Winter Gardens where all 55 of the meetings between 2000 and 2009 were held in private.
- e) He said he had learned that a terminated concession agreement in 2002 led to a legal bill of £51,339 that was not known to the public, that a loan was negotiated from a Brewery that was presented as if it were a grant and that in 2006 an unlawfully awarded concession brought in £31,700 less than had been specifically agreed as a consequence of a complacent disregard for prudence and probity.
- f) The Winter Gardens had been managed by a Town Council that allowed 65% of the town's precept to be used to subsidise the Winter Gardens amounting over 11 years to £640,569. If only that money had been properly spent we would not have ended up with a decaying building that is *no longer fit for purpose or even fit to last*, he said.
- g) Invited by the Mayor to comment on these responses, the member of the public asked who, if anyone, would be responsible taking action in regard to these matters.
- h) Councillor Jim Morgan said that while he agreed with the lessons already mentioned it was important not to let this matter distract the Town Council's attention from the increasingly important new project work due to come its way.
- i) Councillor Harry Rees pointed out that a copy had been supplied to the Isle of Wight Council.
- j) Councillor David George said this issue is not yet settled; it was for the ratepayers to decide and he expected there to be further developments.
- k) Another member of the public said that this had brought a different light to the actions of the last two years and he now felt able to support the Town Council in what had been said tonight.
- l) On another matter, the issue of public facilities on the Esplanade including access to the slipway raised by a member of the public, Councillor Harry Rees said it could be addressed in the course of the meetings currently under way.

The meeting commenced at 7.15 pm

147/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Jones and Debby Robinson.

148/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harry Rees declared a personal interest as Chair of the Ventnor Social Club.

149/11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- a) The minutes of the Town Council meeting of 8 August 2011, having been previously circulated to Members, were taken as read.
 - b) The Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting of 31 August 2011 were received.
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150/11 FINANCE

- a) The Finance report for this meeting had been previously circulated to Members and included information on Bank Balances at 31 August 2011 and a list of payments made during August 2011.
 - b) An accompanying paper set out the related expenditure in relation to the Budget lines for the year to 31 August 2011 with variances from year to date budget provision.
 - c) Councillor Harry Rees commented, in response to the note in the Report about the ongoing cost to Ventnor Town Council of retaining four Point of Sale machines at the request of the Isle of Wight Council, that he would expect those costs to be refunded.
 - d) The Town Clerk responded that they would be included in the wider discussion of ownership of assets retained in the Winter Gardens.
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151/11 INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT

- a) The Internal Auditor's Report for the financial year 2010/11 had been previously circulated to members with the papers for this meeting.
- b) Councillor Harry Rees asked that a copy be placed in the Library.

It was unanimously resolved:

that the report be accepted and Gareth Hughes be thanked for his work as the Town Council's Internal Auditor.

152/11 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

A draft for a revised Complaints Procedure had been previously circulated to members with the papers for this meeting.

It was unanimously resolved:

that the Complaints Procedure as circulated be formally adopted.

153/12 PUTTING GREEN

- a) The Town Clerk introduced the paper for this meeting that had been circulated to members summarising the history of the Town Council's involvement with the Putting Green and identifying options for the future of it.
 - b) A letter from the Isle of Wight Council's Commercial Activities Manager Tricia Stillman indicated that ongoing operation of the Putting Green by Ventnor Town Council was acceptable but only on the basis of an annual rent.
 - c) The letter also asked for the Town Council's views on the Isle of Wight Council taking direct responsibility for the advertising of the concession and its future operation.
 - d) Members also discussed the correspondence between Ventnor Town Council and the Isle of
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Wight Council's Principal Estates Surveyor of early 2009 in which the Town Council was assured it could continue the operation of the Putting Green for at least five years on the then existing terms and conditions following its commitment to fund the new kiosk.

It was unanimously resolved:

that the Town Council is committed to continuing its operation of the Putting Green and believes it has sufficient assurance from the Isle of Wight Council in the correspondence of early 2009 of its right to do so and without payment of rent. The Mayor and Town Clerk were asked to discuss this further with Tricia Stillman.

154/11 SEAWEED

- a) The Mayor invited Councillors Jim Toogood and Jim Morgan to introduce this matter based on discussions they had been involved in.
- b) Councillor Jim Toogood reported on the expected performance of the new pumping solution and commented that there are 47 jobs involved around the harbour.
- c) Councillor Jim Morgan said the crucial issue for the Town Council is not just of seaweed in the haven but the fact that the seaweed was rotting with and the consequent offensive smell which just has to be stopped.
- d) Councillor David George said it was the Isle of Wight Council's problem and they should resolve it without expecting Ventnor Town Council to contribute to it.
- e) Councillor Harry Rees said that the Haven as designed was a natural trap for seaweed and unless the original design was reinstated it was unlikely other solutions would be effective.
- f) With the Mayor's permission, County Councillor Chris Welsford said that he was clear that the Isle of Wight Council held legal advice that they were responsible for the problems arising from the Haven.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- i) the Mayor, Councillors Jim Morgan, Jim Toogood and Harry Rees and the Town Clerk meet with the Isle of Wight Council as planned on 13 September and report back; and
 - ii) the decision on the request from the Isle of Wight Council for a financial contribution from Ventnor Town Council towards the cost of clearing seaweed from the Haven be an Agenda item for the Town Council meeting of 10 October 2011.
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155/11 NATWEST BANK CLOSURE

- a) Councillor Susan Scoccia's letter to the local Chief Executive of the NatWest Bank had been previously circulated to members.
- b) Councillor Harry Rees reported on the angry comments he had received on the matter from members of the public. He thanked County Councillor Susan Scoccia for her letter. He handed the Town Clerk contact details for the Managing Director of the South Regional Office to be written to.
- c) Councillor Simon Haytack commented that once a decision has been made it is unlikely to be affected by letters from Town Councils alone without demonstrations of widespread support.

It was unanimously resolved:

that the Town Council's concern at the proposed closure of the NatWest Ventnor Branch be communicated to the NatWest Managing Director by letter from the Town Clerk.

156/11 VENTNOR CARNIVAL

- a) Councillor Mark Robertson-Walker said that after the concerns about the clash of dates it had been very welcome that Shanklin, Sandown and Cowes had nevertheless contributed to Ventnor's Carnival.
 - b) He also expressed appreciation for the quality of the whole programme delivered by Ventnor Carnival Committee and the extremely valuable contribution of the Ventnor Fringe
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programme.

- c) Councillor Harry Rees said he hoped that the forthcoming joint meeting of the Island's Carnivals would prevent future clashes of dates.

It was unanimously resolved:

that letters of thanks be sent to the Shanklin, Sandown and Cowes Carnival organisers and one of appreciation to the Ventnor Carnival Committee.

157/11 WAR MEMORIAL

- a) Councillor Harry Rees reported on discussions he had been involved in about the need for repair of the War Memorial which is now seriously unstable and stated that an estimate of the cost of repair was of the order of £36,000.
- b) The British Legion is prevented by its Charter from making donations for this purpose and he asked that he be authorised to approach the War Memorials Commission.

It was unanimously resolved:

that Councillor Rees be authorised to discuss the matter with the War Memorials Commission and report back to a future meeting.

158/11 DOGS

The Mayor reported that a Working Party meeting has been held and came to the view that the best approach to the problem would be through a programme of education.

It was unanimously resolved:

that Working Group discussions continue with a report back to the next meeting.

159/11 GREEN PLANTERS

- a) In the absence of Councillor Debby Robinson, Councillor David George took the opportunity to update members on progress with green issues through the Green Towns Initiative
- b) He said there were now three trained cemetery wardens for Ventnor and that a beach clean operation would take place this coming Sunday.
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COMMUNITY BUSES

- a) Councillor Jim Morgan expressed thanks to B&B Taxis and Island Minibus Service who are running the 31 route successfully so far on three hours a day for five days a week.
- b) He commented on how appreciative passengers had been of the opportunity to visit parts of the Town that had previously been inaccessible to them.
- c) He went on to remind members of the workings of the 6 route.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- a) that Ventnor Town Council provide banking support for 31 route until the new Love Ventnor Community Interest Company; and
- b) with one abstention, that Ventnor Town Council meet the cost of an advertisement of the 31 route timetable in the South Wight Chronicle.
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161/1 WINTER GARDENS

For the record, the Town Clerk reported that the Delegated Decision to accept the offer of the Hambrough Group for ownership of the Winter Gardens had been signed off, subject to the seven day call-in period.

162/11 TOWN CLERKS' REPORT

- a) The Town Clerk reported that the lease for the First Aid Hut had been returned to the Isle of Wight Council for amendment following advice from the National Association of Local
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Councils (NALC) and that an apology had been received from the Isle of Wight Council for the failure to inform Ventnor Town Council of their agreement to allow a Fair to occupy the Town Centre Car Park during one day of the Carnival.

- b) He went on to record that the training programme for Members had been successfully completed, requests were being processed for two further Memorial Benches and that the decision by the Big Lottery on the application for funding for an outdoor fitness centre would be known in the first week of October.
 - c) Councillor Harry Rees updated members on the next stage of consultation on the Island Plan and said that he would be present at this week's meeting of the Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils which is to be addressed by the Leader of the Isle of Wight Council and its Chief Executive.
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PUBLIC FORUM

The Mayor re-opened the Public Forum

A member of the public acknowledged the work done by Councillor Jim Morgan and Stuart George in establishing Community Buses and asked that the Town Council continue to stress to providers the importance of these services.

The Meeting closed at 8.35 pm

SIGNED BY THE MAYOR	DATE